

# College Preparation Checklist (page 1 of 3)

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## Pre-High School

- ☐ Use FAFSA4caster<sup>SM</sup> at [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov) to find out how much federal student aid you might receive if you went to college now. This information will help you and your parents plan ahead.
- ☐ Start saving for college if you haven't already. Look into college savings plans that your state may offer.
- ☐ Do your best in school. If you are having difficulty, don't give up—get help from a teacher, tutor or mentor.
- ☐ Become involved in school- or community-based extracurricular activities that enable you to explore your interests, meet new people, and learn new things.
- ☐ Go to career information events. Ask employers what kind of education they expect their employees to have.

## High School

### Every Year

- ☐ Update your information in FAFSA4caster and continue to save for college.
- ☐ Take challenging classes in core academic subjects: most colleges require four years of English, at least three years of social studies (history, civics, geography, economics, etc.), three years of mathematics, and three years of science; and many require two years of a foreign language. Round out your course load with classes in computer science and the arts. To increase your chances of receiving an Academic Competitiveness Grant in college, follow a "rigorous high school program." For more information, visit [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/funding](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov/funding).
- ☐ Stay involved in school- or community-based extracurricular activities that interest you or enable you to explore career interests. Consider working or volunteering. *Remember—it's quality (not quantity) that counts.*
- ☐ Athletes, artists, scholars, and others should start collecting items (such as game tapes, newspaper clippings, stats, awards, artwork, school papers, etc.) for their portfolios.
- ☐ Talk to your school counselor and other mentors about education after high school. Your counselor can answer questions about what classes to take in high school, how to sign up for standardized tests, and where to get money for college.

## 9th Grade

- ☐ Follow a rigorous program of study. (See above, under "Every Year.")
- ☐ Start planning for college and thinking about your career interests. At [www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov) you can register with MyFSA and research your career and college options.

## 10th Grade

- ☐ Continue to follow a rigorous program of study. (See above, under "Every Year.")
- ☐ Meet with your school counselor or mentor to discuss colleges and their requirements.
- ☐ Talk to adults about what they like and dislike in their jobs and about what kind of education is needed for each kind of job.
- ☐ Consider taking a practice Preliminary SAT (PSAT), or the PLAN exam, also known as the "pre-ACT."\*
- ☐ Plan to use your summer wisely: work, volunteer, or take a summer course (away or at a local college).

\* **Remember:** Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.



# College Preparation Checklist (page 2 of 3)

## 11th Grade

### All Year

- ☐ Continue to save money for college.
- ☐ Continue to follow a “rigorous high school program.” (See page 1, under “Every Year.”)
- ☐ Talk to people you know who went to college to learn about what to expect.
- ☐ Research colleges that interest you. Visit them and talk to students. Make lists to help you compare colleges. Think about things like location, size, special programs, and college costs.
- ☐ Go to college fairs and presentations by college representatives.
- ☐ Investigate financial aid, including scholarships. Understand the different types of aid and sources for aid. Check your school’s scholarship postings, colleges’ financial aid Web pages, and your library for directories of special scholarships.
- ☐ For more information about scholarships and federal student aid opportunities, visit **[www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov](http://www.FederalStudentAid.ed.gov)**.

### Fall

- ☐ Take the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT).<sup>\*</sup> Even if you took it for practice last year, you must take the test in 11th grade to qualify for scholarships and programs associated with the National Merit Program.
- ☐ Write to your U.S. senator or representative if you would like to attend a U.S. military academy.
- ☐ See your school counselor if you are interested in participating in an ROTC program.

### Spring

- ☐ Register for and take exams for college admission.<sup>\*</sup> Many colleges accept the SAT Reasoning Test and/or SAT Subject Tests, while others accept the ACT. Check with colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.
- ☐ Make sure you file with the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) Clearinghouse if you want to play for a Division I or II team. When registering for and taking the SAT or ACT, enter “9999” as one of the college choices to have test scores sent to the Clearinghouse.

### Summer Before 12th Grade

- ☐ Narrow down the list of colleges you are interested in attending. If you can, visit schools that interest you.
- ☐ Contact colleges to request information and applications for admission. Ask about financial aid, admission requirements, and deadlines.
- ☐ Decide whether you are going to apply under a particular college’s early decision or early action program. Be sure to learn about the program deadlines and requirements.
- ☐ Update your information in *FAFSA4caster* one last time, and compare the results to the actual costs at the colleges to which you will apply.
- ☐ Now is the time to get serious about applying for scholarships. Your goal is to minimize the amount of loan funds you borrow.
- ☐ Begin preparing for the admissions application process: draft application essays; collect writing samples; assemble portfolios or audition tapes.
- ☐ If you are an athlete and plan to play in college, contact the coaches at the schools to which you are applying and ask about intercollegiate and intramural sports programs and athletic scholarships.

<sup>\*</sup> **Remember:** Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.



# College Preparation Checklist (page 3 of 3)

## 12th Grade

### All Year

- ☐ Continue to follow a rigorous program of study. (See page 1, under “Every Year.”)
- ☐ Update your portfolio. (A portfolio might include awards, game tapes, newspaper clippings, artwork, etc.)
- ☐ Work hard all year; second-semester grades can affect scholarship eligibility.
- ☐ Stay involved and seek leadership roles in your activities.

### Fall

- ☐ Meet with your school counselor to make sure you are on track to graduate and fulfill college admission requirements.
- ☐ If you haven't done so already, register for and take exams such as the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests, or ACT for college admission.\* Check with the colleges you are interested in to see what tests they require.
- ☐ Apply to the colleges you have chosen. Prepare your application carefully. Follow the instructions, and **PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO DEADLINES!**
- ☐ Well before your application deadlines, ask your counselor and teachers to submit required documents (e.g., transcript, letters of recommendation) to the colleges to which you're applying.
- ☐ To prepare to apply for federal student aid, be sure to get a PIN at [www.pin.ed.gov](http://www.pin.ed.gov) so that you can complete your application and access your information online. One of your parents must also get a PIN.

### Winter

- ☐ Encourage your parent(s) to complete income tax forms early. If your parent(s) have not completed the tax forms, you can provide estimated information on your federal student aid application, but remember to make any necessary changes later.
- ☐ As soon after Jan. 1 as possible, complete and submit your *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA<sup>SM</sup>), along with any other financial aid applications your school(s) of choice may require. You can complete the FAFSA online at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov) or on paper, but completing the application online is faster and easier. You should submit your FAFSA by the earliest financial aid deadline of the schools to which you are applying, usually by early February.

- ☐ If you have questions about the federal student aid programs or need assistance with the application process, call **1-800-4-FED-AID (1-800-433-3243)** or TTY for the hearing impaired, **1-800-730-8913**.
- ☐ After you submit the FAFSA, you should receive your *Student Aid Report* (SAR) within three days to three weeks. Quickly make any necessary corrections and submit them to the FAFSA processor.
- ☐ If the schools you are applying to require it, complete the CSS (College Scholarship Service) Profile. Many private colleges and universities use this information to help them award nonfederal student aid funds.
- ☐ Complete scholarship applications. Apply for as many as you can—you may be eligible for more than you think.
- ☐ Parents should check their eligibility for the Hope Credit, Lifetime Learning Credit, or other tax benefits.

### Spring

- ☐ Visit colleges that have invited you to enroll.
- ☐ Review your college acceptances and compare financial aid packages.
- ☐ Contact a school's financial aid office if you have questions about the aid that school has offered you. In fact, getting to know your financial aid staff early is a good idea no matter what—they can tell you about deadlines, other aid for which you can apply, and important paperwork you might need to submit.
- ☐ When you decide which school you want to attend, notify that school of your commitment and submit any required financial deposit. Many schools require this notification and deposit by May 1.

*\* Remember: Register for all tests in advance and be sure to give yourself time to prepare appropriately! If you have difficulty paying a registration fee, see your school counselor about getting a fee waiver.*

